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THE PARTITION OF POLAND

SINCE the disasters of the Seven Years' War the influence of France in European politics had declined. The French armies had been unsuccessful; the French king was plunged in vulgar dissipation and had become even more apathetic than in his youth. It was not strange, therefore, that a country which had always received special attention from French diplomats, and had been to a certain extent a protégé of that kingdom, should have been partitioned by unscrupulous neighbors, without consultation with France and without her taking any steps to interfere. It can safely be said that so important a measure as the partition of Poland could not have occurred during the reign of Louis XIV. without his approval; but France could no longer dictate terms to the other powers of Europe, as she had done a century before. Neither Russia nor Prussia was then regarded as formidable; now both those countries possessed powerful armies and were ruled by able sovereigns. While other states had become stronger, France had grown weaker. She never held the position in Europe which she occupied before the fatal war of the Spanish Succession, and the results of the alliance with Austria still further lowered her prestige and reduced her power.

The practical extinction of an ancient nationality by neighbors, whose only justification for their conduct was that they were strong and Poland was weak, has been justly denounced as an act for which no defence could be made. It was, however, a transaction wholly in keeping with the political immorality of the eighteenth century. It was charged against the French Republicans that they refused to be bound by existing treaties; that they overthrew ancient governments and disregarded long-established boundaries; that they recognized neither the contracts nor the rights of nations. For all this they could have found abundant precedent. There was indeed, under the old régime, more formality and more of diplomatic usages; but the powdered and bewigged statesmen of the eighteenth century were as regardless of any restraint, except that of superior force, as was any long-haired patriot of the Revolution. Different phrases were used; in the past they had spoken of the glory of the sovereign and the

honor of the state; after the Revolution it was in the name of the rights of man and the liberties of the people that treaties were violated and boundaries swept away, but the spirit that governed was the same.

When Louis XIV. married the Spanish Infanta, Mazarin said that France could lay claim to the Spanish succession, no matter what renunciations were given. Frederick II. preached the same doctrine in the next century. "One must not break his word without some reasons," he said, "or he will gain the reputation of a light and changeable man"; but for any breach of faith he had as his defence that it was demanded by the interests of the state. "Shall a monarch break his word or the state perish?" was the only justification he saw fit to furnish for violating his word whenever he deemed it for his interest. "In matters of state policy," wrote a publicist, "we must not be deceived by the speculative ideas that are vulgarly formed about the justice, the equity, the moderation, and the candor of nations and of their leaders. All reduces itself finally to a question of force." "As to the doctrines of Macchiavelli," wrote another, "he teaches nothing new or unheard of; he tells only what our predecessors have done and what men of to-day practise with utility."

These quotations from political writers do not by any means misstate the accepted political traditions of European courts during the eighteenth century, and such doctrines found their full expression when two of the greatest sovereigns of modern times were seated on two of the greatest thrones of Europe. Frederick and Catharine resembled each other in force of intellect, in unscrupulous ambition, and in their resolution to increase the power of the states they ruled. The success of their long careers is proof that their methods were not out of place in the age in which they lived. The war of the Austrian Succession had shown the readiness of almost every European power to join in the attack of an enfeebled state, where there seemed a prospect of gaining something from the spoils. Another nation that appeared defenceless was now attacked, and with better success. When we consider the political traditions of the age, the wonder is that the partition of Poland was so long postponed.

The condition of Poland had not improved since the election of Stanislaus gave rise to the war of the Polish Succession. Augustus III. of Saxony then obtained the throne which had been occupied by his father, but under these Saxon rulers there was no change in the government of the country; it remained in the state of administrative anarchy which had long been its lot.

Indeed, the powers of the king were so restricted that he could exercise little influence in favor of reform, even had he been so inclined, and any efforts to establish an orderly government in Poland would have met with opponents both within and without the kingdom. The nobles would not yield one whit of their lawless independence, and they were hostile to any change which would increase the efficiency of the administration at the cost of their unrestrained freedom of action; as Voltaire said, it was a government of Goths and Franks which survived in the eighteenth century. From the prince whose income of a million was insufficient to defray his splendor, to the gentleman whose only possessions consisted of a horse, a sabre, and a title of nobility, all were equally unwilling to make the sacrifices requisite to increase the strength and insure the safety of the country; to protect the fatherland they would surrender their lives, but not their license; and even if the nobles had desired any reforms, these would have been prevented by neighbors who saw their advantage in Poland's weakness.

There was, however, one powerful state which had regarded the integrity of Poland as important to its own interests, and the fear of its interference in the past would have deterred those who hoped to profit by Poland's dismemberment. For almost two centuries the relations of France with Poland had been intimate; French candidates had twice been chosen to the Polish throne, France had repeatedly promised her protection to the Poles, and the preservation of Poland as an independent state was long regarded as essential to French interests in the north of Europe. After the war of the Austrian Succession some change took place in the tone assumed by France, and French politicians began to say that it was useless to squander money in the affairs of a country so defenceless and so far removed. "What do we care for that republic and its elections?" said the secretary for foreign affairs in 1762. "A Frenchman for king, a Pole, a Russian, it is all the same to us."¹

These views were held by some of Louis's ministers, but they were not held by the king. During the last twenty years of his life, Louis XV. occupied himself with a private diplomacy, which was kept secret from his regular advisers, and in it Poland had the most important part. This secret diplomacy was among the many curious features of his reign. Louis was not destitute of sagacity, and his views of foreign policy were usually judicious and correct; but partly from listlessness, partly from timidity, this

¹ Hennin to Tercier, February 19, 1762.

absolute sovereign was unwilling to overrule decisions of which he disapproved. Apparently as a consolation for his insignificance in his own councils, the king had a diplomatic system of his own. In many European courts there were regularly accredited representatives of France, and there was also a more obscure agent, sometimes a secretary of legation, sometimes a man with no official position, who corresponded secretly with the king, and whose instructions were often in direct opposition to those emanating from the foreign office in the king's name. Such a system naturally came to nothing; its only results were that the influence of France was frequently neutralized by conflicting instructions, and that Louis was at times plunged into the greatest anxiety lest his secret operations should come to the knowledge of his own ministers. Curiously enough, this monarch, who had the right to choose and remove his advisers according to his own caprice, and whose authority was as absolute as that of the Czar of the Russias, was in abject fear lest he should have to face his own servants with an acknowledgment of the orders he had seen fit to issue; his feelings were those of a mischievous boy who has been caught at his tricks. One of his agents was arrested and the king, in his terror lest the secret correspondence should come to the knowledge of the ministry, applied to one of the police officers to help him out of the dilemma. "I opened the whole matter and confided in him," said the trembling monarch of 25,000,000 people, "and I think this pleased him."¹

For many years the affairs of Poland received much attention in these secret intrigues. The agents of Louis were instructed to preserve unimpaired the credit which France had so long held, that at the proper time it might be exerted to secure the elevation of the Prince of Conti to the Polish throne.²

The influence of France in Poland rested on long-established relations of friendship, and was considerable when reinforced by a liberal expenditure of money among an impoverished nobility. But since the beginning of the eighteenth century Russia, to a larger extent than any other power, controlled the policy of the neighboring kingdom. After Peter the Great transformed Russia from a country of barbarians into a powerful state, she more and more assumed control of the destinies of a land which was still a prey to mediæval disorder, and which furnished a promising field for the expansion of Russian power. Her influence rested not on friendship, but on force. "The hatred which they have in this

¹ *Secret du Roi*, II. 185.

² *Correspondance Secrète de Louis XV.* 2 vols.

country for the Russians," said Frederick, "surpasses all imagination."¹ "The Russian power is hated in Poland," wrote the Prussian minister, "from the greatest noble to the lowest peasant. They all hate everything that is Muscovite."²

But Poland was helpless from lack of efficient government; her territories were open to invasion with no natural defences, no mountain ranges, nor even any great system of rivers protecting her vast plains from Russia on the one hand and Prussia on the other. With the principles of statecraft which prevailed in Europe, we can be certain that the dismemberment of such a country must often have been considered. Two hundred years before any partition was attempted, it was suggested that Poland might profitably be divided between the Emperor and Russia; later plans were made for a partition in which Sweden should have a share, and early in the eighteenth century a division was suggested between Peter the Great and the Elector of Brandenburg.³ None of these schemes took shape, but the condition of Poland became more defenceless as her neighbors became more powerful. Once the valor of her citizens might have insured the safety of their country; now it was certain that bravery, unaccompanied with regular military organization and ill-provided with money or arms, could be of no avail against the well-equipped and well-disciplined armies in the service of the great European monarchies. There was, indeed, some hope for Poland's safety, because it seemed unlikely that those who wished to despoil her could agree on the division of the plunder, and this belief was held by French statesmen down to the time that the first partition was carried into effect. The Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed his conviction that the states adjoining Poland, filled with mutual distrust and jealousy, were really her guardians and defenders.⁴

This element of safety was dispelled when the thrones of Russia and Prussia were occupied by Catharine and Frederick. From his youth Frederick had felt the importance of what was known as Prussian Poland to the development of Prussian power. When still under twenty-one he wrote a treatise, in which he argued that the acquisition of this territory was necessary in order to join together the scattered possessions of Prussia. The fancy of youth was not forgotten in maturity. When the perils of the Seven Years' War were past, Frederick, in a testament which he

¹ Frederick to Prince Henry, January 31, 1771.

² Benoit, February 15, 1769.

³ These schemes of partition are given in Sorel's *Question d'Orient*.

⁴ *Mémoire du Duc de Praslin*.

prepared for the use of his successor, again laid down the need which Prussia had of this portion of Poland, and he declared that Russia was the greatest obstacle to its acquisition. The instruction was not needed by his successor. Frederick found means in his own lifetime to remove Russian opposition, and to turn his dream of conquest into a reality.

He fully realized the importance of Russia as an ally. "It is a terrible power," he said to his brother, "which in half a century will make all Europe tremble." Throughout Frederick's career it was Russia that he most dreaded; for France, under her imbecile administration, he felt contempt rather than fear; the discipline of his armies, and confidence in his own military skill, made him always ready to meet Austria; but of the vast forces that his northern neighbor could put in the field, he was justly apprehensive. In the Seven Years' War it was from the Russian armies that he suffered his most serious defeats, and had Russia remained constant to the alliance, he would certainly have been ruined at last. The friendship of Peter proved the salvation of Frederick.

It was natural, therefore, when the great war was ended, that he should wish to form a permanent alliance with a state from whose hostility he had suffered so much, and such a combination met the approval of Catharine. In Poland the two powers had common interests; doubtless Catharine would have preferred to deal with that country alone, but she saw that this was impossible, while if she and Frederick united in action, no other state was in condition to hinder them.

In 1763 Augustus III., Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, died and the succession to the Polish throne was again open. In the following spring a treaty was signed between Russia and Prussia, by which they agreed to unite their influence and procure the election of Stanislaus Poniatowski, and they further agreed to prevent any change in the Polish form of government, and especially to prevent any alterations by which the elective monarchy might become hereditary, or the right of any Polish nobleman to check legislation be done away with.¹

Poniatowski owed his selection as the future king of Poland to the favor of Catharine. He had long been known to the Empress of Russia, and he was personally agreeable to her, said Frederick, who had learned discretion as to the manner in which he referred to sister sovereigns and their favorites. Stanislaus Poniatowski was connected with some of the most ancient and powerful Polish families, and combined with an illustrious pedigree

¹ This treaty is found in Häusser.

attractions of mind and person ; he was tall and handsome with an imposing bearing, his manners were pleasing, his speech was facile and at times eloquent ; he spent two years in Paris, where he studied morals from the Duke of Richelieu and learned the philosophical jargon that was finding its way into polite society ; he was said to excel in the three arts of a French courtier, — he could seduce women, he could conduct himself with credit in an affair of honor, and he could roll up debts which he was unable to pay.¹

Thus equipped, he went to Russia and was made ambassador from Poland, but his chief duty was to pay court to the young princess Catharine. He played his part well ; he could quote Voltaire to her and he could talk love to her, and she enjoyed both ; he was young and handsome and he soon became the acknowledged lover of the future Empress. In time Poniatowski was recalled, and this romance came to an end ; but though Catharine soon consoled herself, she retained a kindly feeling for the handsome Pole. She was not indeed a woman who would allow any fond recollections of the past to interfere with her political judgment, but she knew that Poniatowski would owe his election to her and that he would be forced to rely on her support. She knew also that he was a weak man and with him for a ruler it would be easy to keep Poland in that condition of anarchy which would further her own plans.²

Catharine's favorite did not obtain the prize without opposition ; for Saxony furnished a candidate in one of the sons of Augustus III. Though Poniatowski was a Pole, yet his rule meant the rule of Russia, and Polish patriots rallied to the support of the Saxon prince. But they could do nothing without foreign help, and this they were not able to obtain. Poniatowski himself applied in secret for the aid of France ; he knew that it was to Russia he would owe his election, but he cherished schemes of reform for his distracted country. Assured of the friendship of France, he might be relieved from his dependence upon Catharine, and free to consider the interests of Poland instead of those of Russia. His election was certain and a secret alliance with him would probably have been for the interests of France and Poland ; some politicians would have found amusement as well as profit in allowing Catharine to elect her lover and then using him to thwart her plans. But the dauphin had married a Saxon princess, a sister of the Saxon candidate, and Louis XV. was always ready to

¹ *Secret du Roi*, I. 272.

² "We couldn't find a better person for our interests," she wrote Frederick, October 6, 1763.

placate his family when they asked of him anything except to dismiss a mistress. He promised therefore to support the interests of the dauphin's brother-in-law, and at the same time he allowed intrigues to proceed in favor of Poniatowski. By the king's orders one French agent in Poland advocated the claims of the Saxon candidate, while another constantly proclaimed his friendship for Poniatowski, and as a result, any influence that France might have exercised was frittered away. "Never was France in such a position," wrote a diplomat. "All the world is weary of us as allies."¹

It was not with such weak vacillation that Catharine and Frederick carried on their plans. Ten thousand Russian soldiers advanced upon Warsaw, while Prussian armies gathered near the Polish boundaries on the west. These republicans, said Frederick, could see with whom they would have to deal if they acted contrary to the wishes of Russia and Prussia. With such election agents, the result was sure. Russian soldiers were present at the diet and entered the hall where the deputies met for consultation; the patriots were put to flight, their leaders condemned as rebels, and Stanislaus Poniatowski was elected without opposition. "In all our history there was no example of an election so tranquil and so unanimous," he wrote with complacency.² Tranquillity in Poland was only obtained when her independence had ceased to exist.

The new king made some efforts to throw off the Russian yoke and to effect reforms in his unhappy country; but such attempts at independence were promptly checked. Neither Catharine nor Frederick would allow any changes which might make Poland an independent nation. The agents of both these monarchies were instructed to prevent any alteration in the Polish form of government, and most of all any abolition of the *liberum veto*, "which," said a memorandum of St. Petersburg, "is of such essential importance to the neighbors of the republic." "It is for Your Majesty's interests," wrote one of Frederick's servants, "that Poland should remain in its present condition of anarchy," and it was to insure this result that he bade his representatives oppose any change in the government of the country.³ While any plan was opposed that might be of benefit, a measure sure to involve the country in additional disorder was insisted upon, literally at

¹ Hennin to Tercier, September 20, 1763.

² Stanislaus to Mme. Geoffrin, September 9, 1774.

³ Finckenstein to Frederick, October 5, 1764. Frederick to Solms, October 6, 1764; to Benott, October 29, 1767, etc.

the point of the bayonet. Catharine demanded the extension of equal political rights to persons not members of the Catholic Church. Her efforts gained the praises which Voltaire and the philosophers had always ready for the Semiramis of the north, but toleration loses some of its charms when it is enforced by a foreign soldiery who burn peasants' huts and ravish their wives in order to teach liberal principles. The unhappy Poniatowski besought his patron to cease these efforts in behalf of dissenters, and he told her of the misery worked by the Russian soldiers who were employed to enforce the edict. He received in reply only reproaches for his ingratitude to his benefactress. "I will admit to you," Frederick wrote to his ambassador in St. Petersburg, "that on examining Hugo Grotius it is difficult to justify the edict of the Empress of Russia."¹ Catharine cared as little for the principles of Hugo Grotius as Frederick himself, and these measures for dissenters soon produced the effect that might have been anticipated, — a large party of the Catholics rose in insurrection, and to the other miseries of Poland was now added civil war.

This rising had no result except to make the condition of the country worse. The insurgents applied to France for aid and Choiseul secretly furnished them with money, and also sent an officer by the name of Dumouriez, who was to become famous in movements more important than Polish insurrections. These efforts at assistance were of no avail. Dumouriez found some sixteen or seventeen thousand men in arms, but they were almost entirely cavalry, who recognized no authority and knew no discipline; they were for the most part ill-mounted and they had not a piece of artillery nor a company of infantry.² Such an unruly horde could not contend against the Russian soldiers, who had acquired a certain degree of military discipline.

This insurrection broke out in 1768, and, though the insurgents had no chance of success, it continued to smoulder and led to important results; for now the question of the dismemberment of Poland began to be seriously considered. Frederick usually receives the credit of having conceived the idea of a division of the territories of Poland among the three confederates, but such a conception was so in keeping with the political principles of the age that it cannot be said to have originated with any one man; at Vienna and St. Petersburg, as well as at Berlin, suggestions of a possible division of Poland can occasionally be found in the state papers. But it was Frederick who first gave to them a definite

¹ Frederick to Solms, February 5, 1767.

² *Mémoires de Dumouriez*, I. 171, etc.

form, and had it not been for his consummate diplomatic skill it would have been impossible to bring three rival powers to agree upon any scheme for the dismemberment of a weaker neighbor. It was the first example, Frederick said in his memoirs, of three powers agreeing on a partition and carrying it to a peaceable execution, and he is entitled to whatever credit attaches to this result.

Russia was then engaged in war with Turkey, and by reason of her successes was in a position to demand great concessions from the Porte as a condition of peace.¹ These victories excited almost as much consternation at Vienna as at Constantinople, and the possibility that Russia would demand Moldavia and Wallachia as a condition of peace appalled the advisers of Maria Theresa. In this state of affairs Frederick found his opportunity. By his treaty with Russia he was bound to furnish a large subsidy for the Turkish war, but therein he saw no advantage for himself; his thrift was pained by the possibility of a liberal expenditure with small prospect of return; while in the complications of Polish insurrection there was an opportunity to add to his own territories without risk or expense.²

His first endeavor was to establish amicable relations between Austria and Prussia. He knew well that Maria Theresa would never be his friend, but her son Joseph II. was now Emperor and entertained for the great Frederick feelings very different from the invincible dislike of his mother. In 1769 the two monarchs met at Neisse and this was followed by a second conference in 1770, in which Kaunitz also took part. Meetings between kings were not common then; monarchs, like their subjects, stayed at home instead of roaming over Europe, and the conferences excited universal curiosity.

Contrary to the general belief, the partition of Poland was not then arranged, but Frederick succeeded in his purpose of dispelling the aversion and mistrust with which he had long been regarded at Vienna. Nothing could have been more harmonious than the meeting of the sovereigns. Joseph and Kaunitz assured Frederick that Silesia was now forgotten and plans for its recovery were forever abandoned. On the other hand, the old king, with his marvellous knowledge of human vanity, flattered his former adversaries. Frederick talked well and he loved to talk, and the

¹ See report of Vergennes, June, 1768, of the intrigues at Constantinople at this time.

² See the correspondence of Frederick and Count Solms in the valuable Russian historical collection published in the *Recueil de la Société Historique Russe*.

young Emperor was content to listen to the wisdom of so famous a man. "At supper," says one of the guests, "the king talked all the time for three hours. The Prussian princes and generals dared not open their mouths lest they should disturb their sovereign or lose one of his words, but some of our Austrian generals slept peacefully."¹ Frederick praised the Austrian army, to which the young king gave much attention. He assured Joseph that if they could act together they need have no fear of any other power; he excited the ambitions and the aspirations of the young ruler and found in him the promise of future greatness. "It is impossible for me to be the enemy of a great man," he cried, as he claimed to discover the talents that must make the young monarch famous. "As for myself," he said, "when I was young I was ambitious, but I am so no longer. . . . You think me full of bad faith, I know it; I deserved it a little; circumstances compelled it, but all that is changed." He was even more successful in flattering the vanity of Kaunitz. "Your minister," he said to Joseph, "has the wisest head in Europe." The old chancellor insisted on reading to the king a political catechism, in which he had traced the true policy to be adopted by Prussia and Austria. Frederick was filled with admiration. "Won't you give me your little catechism?" he said to Kaunitz as they parted. "I should like to have it always under my eyes, for I sincerely wish to conform my conduct to it."²

It was too valuable to entrust to strange hands, but even if a copy had been furnished, it is doubtful if Frederick would have spent many hours in its study. The king obtained what interested him more than Joseph's ambitious dreams or Kaunitz's political wisdom,—the assurance that Austria did not feel bound to consult France as to her future movements. In proceeding with his schemes for Polish dismemberment, he now knew that he need fear no hinderance from France. "It is fortunate," he wrote, "that the French should be in their present condition of exhaustion; deprived of their assistance, the Austrians will be more tractable and more gentle. . . . If anything could arrest them, it would be their dear allies the French, who perhaps will not look with pleasure upon the dismemberment of Poland."³ But France under Louis XV. was in no condition to interfere, and the Aus-

¹ *Relation du Prince Albert de Saxe.*

² The interview at Neisse is described in Joseph's letters to Maria Theresa, August 29 and September 25; *Briefwechsel Maria Theresia's und Joseph's II.* See also instructions, etc., published by Berr; for the interview at Neustadt, see the same and the reports of Kaunitz.

³ Frederick to Finckenstein, May, 1771.

trians, though nominally close allies, did not feel it necessary to disclose their purpose of sharing in the spoils of Poland until the agreement was ready to put in execution.

Fortified by an alliance with Austria, Frederick was in position to impress upon Catharine's mind the necessity of dealing moderately with the Turks and seeking her compensation in Poland. Already a suggestion had been made to that effect. In 1769 Count Lymar presented to Frederick the plan of a partition of Poland which bore a surprising resemblance to the scheme that was afterwards carried out. The king usually gave little heed to volunteer diplomacy, and it seems doubtful whether Lymar or Frederick should have the credit for so ingenious a device. At all events, Frederick at once sent the plan to his representative at St. Petersburg, and told him to show it to Count Panin, the Russian minister. "This plan has a certain *éclat*," the king wrote in a very casual tone. "It seems attractive."¹ It was not favorably received. Panin suggested other plans; this had its advantages, he said, but as for Russia she cared for no further conquests; her territories were sufficient.² It was Frederick's just boast that he knew when to wait and when the time for action had come. He saw that Russia still regarded Poland as her own, and as yet recognized no necessity for any division with her neighbors, and he patiently bided his time.

Some steps taken by the Austrians furnished an excuse for reopening the Polish question. In 1769 Austrian troops had taken possession of a small piece of land formerly belonging to Hungary, and called the Zips. It was announced that the movement was made with no thought of conquest; but Hungary had claims on this district, certainly of great antiquity, for they went back to 1412, and these it was proposed to submit to the Polish king in order to reach some amicable agreement. The validity of such claims needs no examination. "I have a very poor opinion of our titles," said Maria Theresa, who had no taste for the unscrupulous measures adopted by her son and Kaunitz. About all that could be said was that the Zips constituted a very small and unimportant strip of mountainous land, and it mattered little to whom it belonged. But in 1770 the Austrians extended the line they had established, and under similar claims took possession of a somewhat larger piece, pending the examination of the further titles which had been exhumed at Vienna.³

¹ Frederick to Solms, February, 1769.

² Solms to Frederick, March 3, 1769.

³ Referat of August 19 and October 18, 1770.

Frederick was ready to follow so good an example, and in 1770 his troops also entered Polish soil. This was not done under any claim of title, but the pest was raging in Poland, and in his zeal to ward off pestilence from Prussia the king formed a sanitary cordon, and stationed his troops well beyond his own frontiers. Thus the matter stood in January, 1771, when Prince Henry, Frederick's brother, was visiting St. Petersburg, and Catharine for the first time responded favorably to the suggestion of a partition. "I was one evening with the Empress," he writes, "and she said jokingly that the Austrians had taken possession of two starosties, and, she added, why should not every one take some also? I replied that you had established a cordon in Poland, but you had not occupied any starosties. She said, laughingly, why not occupy them? And Count Czernichef added, why not take the bishopric of Warnia, for after all every one must have something? Although this was said as a pleasantry, I am convinced that very possibly you may profit by the suggestion."¹

Frederick needed no one to incite him to diligence in such an endeavor; but when he took a hand in dismembering Poland, he intended that his share should be sufficient to repay the risk. "As to the duchy of Warnia," he wrote, "I have not taken possession of it, because the game is not worth the candle. This portion is so small that it would not compensate for the clamor it would excite; but Polish Prussia would be worth the while. . . . If one seizes bagatelles eagerly, it creates a character for avidity and insatiability that I should not wish to be attributed to me, more than is already done in Europe."²

Austria had set the example, and Frederick was now eager to follow it. "I see nothing for me to do," he wrote, "but to follow her and, like her, make use of ancient titles, which for that matter my archives will furnish me."³ He was right in his confidence as to the contents of his archives; diligent officials were set to work ransacking them, and with surprising promptness they furnished indubitable proofs that Polish Prussia was by law a Prussian province, and in taking it the king would, as with Silesia, only be asserting his just rights.

But if Frederick was to obtain a liberal portion for himself, it was necessary that his allies should be well provided for, and he did his best to excite the greed and overcome the scruples of the Austrian court. "Rummage your archives," he said to the

¹ *Œuvres de Frédéric*, XXVI. 345.

² Frederick to Prince Henry, January 31, 1771.

³ Frederick to Solms, February 20, 1771.

Austrian ambassador, "and see if you have not pretensions to advance on something more than you have already occupied, something like a palatinate that would be to your taste. Believe me, we must profit by the occasion. I will take my part and Russia will do the same."¹ He dealt with Catharine with equal liberality. "To indemnify the Empress for the expenses of the war," he wrote, "I propose that she shall take a piece of Poland to suit her taste."²

Frederick's allies were less eager or more scrupulous, and instead of acceding to the plan for a partition, the Austrians offered to abandon the portion of Poland of which they had taken possession.³ Even Catharine hesitated about putting into execution the suggestions she had made. The Russians, wrote Count Solms, wanted to postpone these plans and were unable to reconcile a project for dismemberment with the repeated guarantees they had given Poland for the preservation of her territory intact.⁴ Frederick had no patience with such scruples. "These guarantees are no longer in force," he wrote Solms. "I know very well Russia has given assurances of her desire to preserve intact the provinces of that country, but after the confederates have openly taken up arms against her, it does not seem to me that Poland can claim this guarantee."⁵

In due time the Russians adopted Frederick's views and either decided that their guarantees were no longer in force, or that it was not worth while to regard them if they were; but while they were ready to agree with Frederick upon the dismemberment of Poland, they refused to deal with him with the same liberality that he had shown them.⁶ In addition to Polish Prussia, Frederick demanded the important city of Dantzic, situated on the Vistula, and to this Catharine would not agree. It was a free city, she said, whose liberties had been specially guaranteed by Russia and free it must remain. Frederick replied to this argument with the vivacity which often characterizes his papers. "I look upon this matter as a bagatelle," he wrote; "Strasburg was a free city and Louis XIV. took it; how many parallel cases does history furnish? . . . In return for the risks to which I shall expose myself for Russia,

¹ Arneth, VIII. 305.

² Frederick to Solms, April 28, 1771.

³ Finckenstein to Frederick, May 13, 1771.

⁴ Solms to Frederick, March 12, 1771; Joseph to Leopold, May, 1771.

⁵ Frederick to Solms, March 24, 1771.

⁶ "It is with infinite pleasure that I learn from your despatches of the 12th the favorable reception which Count Panin has given to the proposition of my aggrandizement on the side of Poland." Frederick to Solms, March 27, 1771.

I must obtain the continuity of my possessions. . . . Messieurs les Russes, you wish that I should expose myself in your quarrels, you want my troops, and that in assisting you I should run the risk of a general war ; all very well, but Polish Prussia and Dantzic is the price I put on the services I render you. . . . Have the goodness, my dear Russians, to examine and see if you have any need of me, or whether I am of no use. In a word, do you want my merchandise or can you do without it?"¹ But all his eloquence did not obtain Dantzic, and Frederick left its acquisition to the future.

After much bargaining the agreement between Russia and Prussia was made.² Russia was to have the territory beyond the Dnieper and the Düna ; the share of Frederick was Polish Prussia and some adjacent districts. Russia received in population and territory the larger portion, but the districts ceded to Frederick were richer and had a special importance in connecting his scattered possessions. It was provided that if Austria wished to join, she should have her share in the plunder ; but if she refused, Frederick and Catharine agreed to furnish armies and defend their new possessions against any invader.³ Little trouble was expected from the Poles, for they were powerless against Prussia and Russia combined. "We must expect," Frederick complained, "that the Poles will make a great outcry ; that vain and intriguing nation makes an outcry over everything, but an army on the Vistula will stop their clamor."⁴

The delay in the negotiations came from Austria. Maria Theresa was sincerely opposed to this unscrupulous division of the territories of a weak and friendly power, and as the matter advanced she expressed herself in no measured terms. "We have tried to act after the Prussian fashion," she said, "and at the same time to keep the appearance of honesty. . . . I should always think our possessions bought too dear, if they were gotten at the expense of honor, of religion and good faith, and of the glory of the monarchy. When all my states were menaced, I rested on my good right and God's help ; now when right is not on my side, . . . when equity and good sense are against me, I have no rest."⁵ "The measures we have taken," she declared again, "have been so contrary to honesty and uprightness that even the King of

¹ Frederick to Solms, October 30, November 13, 1771.

² The agreement was signed February 19, 1772.

³ Secret article. Beer, II. 334.

⁴ Frederick to Solms, November 15, 1771.

⁵ Maria Theresa to Joseph II., January 20, 1772. Letter cited by Arneth.

Prussia can accuse us of falseness and duplicity." Of all the pangs which the partition of Poland caused the Empress-queen none probably were as bitter as this thought.

In their desire to participate in the gain and escape some of the infamy, the Austrians suggested that Frederick might resign to them a portion of Silesia and take the share set off to them in Poland. "What did you say?" cried Frederick to the ambassador. "I have the gout in my feet, and when it goes to my head you can make that proposition. We are partitioning Poland and not my estates."¹ As the Austrians were to share in the spoil, Frederick was resolved that they should not leave him and Catharine to bear alone the animosity of Poland.² Finally they consented to his proposition, and having decided to join in the partition they showed a willingness to take their full portion. "Permit me to say, you have a good appetite," said Frederick to their minister, as he stated the amount of Poland that would satisfy Austria's demands. At last all parties were content, and the final treaty was signed at St. Petersburg on August 2, 1772. It declared in the name of the Holy Trinity that the anarchy existing in Poland excited fears of the total destruction of that republic; and, in order to pacify the country, as well as to settle their own ancient and legal claims, they had decided to annex the various districts which they then proceeded to take. By this first partition of Poland about one-quarter of the territory and of the population of the country was divided among the three powers.³ The number of Poles who became Russians, Prussians, and Austrians was about two millions. Considering the poverty of the land and the misery and degradation of the peasants, who were serfs attached to the soil in a state varying little, if at all, from that of three hundred years before, it is probable that their material condition was improved rather than injured by the change of rulers.

The news of the partition was received with little emotion in Europe; such an act was so in accord with the political morality of the time that no one was surprised, and for that reason the community was the less disturbed by it. In Poland herself the announcement that she must surrender one-quarter of her terri-

¹ Report of Swieten, April 21, 1772.

² Frederick to Solms, February 5, 1772.

³ The figures are usually given much higher. I have followed the estimate made in Russia and published by Beer, "*Evaluation de la valeur intrinsèque des parts des trois cours.*" This gives the population of the territory taken by the three powers at about two millions. It corresponds more closely with the probable population of Poland under the conditions then existing than the much-higher estimates that are usually given.

tories to her neighbors excited a feeling of despair. It was the first step towards the extinction of the Polish nationality; if it was not yet "the end of Poland," it was the beginning of the end. But nothing remained for the king and the diet but to yield what had been taken, lest the three powers should punish a refusal by demanding more. "Some money and some threats will bring these people to agree to our desires," wrote Frederick; "and if we have to resort to force, the only result will be that we shall make a new partition and take more."¹ It was the knowledge of this that made the Poles submissive, and in 1775 Poland ceded to the powers the territories which they had seized. Both at St. Petersburg and at Berlin there was great rejoicing over the auspicious result, and Catharine declared she had never signed a treaty with so much satisfaction.²

In the gratification which Frederick felt over the successful termination of this protracted and difficult negotiation, there was an additional pleasure in the fact that his old enemy, Maria Theresa, who had so long denounced him as a robber, a man without faith or honor, should have been associated in a transaction beside which the conquest of Silesia seemed an heroic enterprise; her feelings of remorse, combined with her desire that her neighbors should gain no greater advantages than herself, amused the great cynic. "She wept and she took," he said. Perhaps, as long as she took, it was well that she should also weep. It is certain that her partners shed no tears over the woes of Poland. "The Empress Catharine and I were brigands," said the great king; "but that pious Empress-queen, how did she arrange the matter with her confessor?"

JAMES BRECK PERKINS.

¹ Frederick to Benoit, November 4, 1772.

² Rapport de Lobkowitz, September 24, 1772.